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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [YM](#) [PTER](#)
SUBJECT: YEMEN: GOVERNMENT INTIMIDATING JOURNALISTS TO CURB
SAADA REPORTING

REF: SANAA 001577

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Angie Bryan for reasons
1.4 (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In two separate incidents ROYG forces harassed journalists of an independent Yemeni weekly, "al-Shar'e" (The Street). On July 20 security forces arrested and detained an al-Shar'e reporter, and ten days later security forces entered the paper's offices, damaged property, and brought charges against the founders of al-Shar'e. This harassment indicates the paper's frank reporting is striking a nerve in the Yemeni establishment. END SUMMARY.

MOD SUPPRESSING AL-SHAR'E REPORTING

¶2. (C) In two separate incidents, ROYG officers have acted against journalists at Sanaa-based independent weekly al-Shar'e. EMBOFFS on July 31 met with Nayif Hassan and Nabeel Shabib--owners, editors, and writers of "al-Shar'e." The two, who describe themselves as independent investigative journalists, established "al-Shar'e" with their own funds to provide straight-forward information to the Yemeni public without bias. Hassan told EMBOFFS that on July 30 nine armed men from Yemen's Ministry of Defense (MOD) entered his office building looking for him, threatening to kill him, and accusing all journalists of being terrorists. He hid and the men left after damaging office property. The MOD is charging Hassan and "al-Shar'e" with endangering national security by publishing maps on the Saada conflict revealing sensitive information. (NOTE: Local English-language daily "Yemen Observer" reported on August 4 that the MOD's prosecutor is accusing Hassan and "al-Shar'e" of trying to breach state security, abuse the army, affect the soldiers' morale, and publish information on field operations. END NOTE) Hassan argued his reporting on the Saada conflict was geared toward accurately portraying the situation there without favoring the ROYG or the Huthis. He pointed out that the Huthis labeled him an infidel when he was in Saada reporting on the conflict.

¶3. (C) Hassan went on to say that Minister of Interior Rashad Muhammad al-Alimi was trying to mediate his case and was told by Minister of Defense Ahmed Ali that the case is not in his (Ali's) hands because "he cannot go over (Northwest Regional Military Commander General) Ali Muhsen (al-Ahmar)." (COMMENT: By saying "go over," Hassan probably meant the Minister of Defense was saying he could not overrule Ali Muhsen. While there is no information to corroborate Ali Muhsen's role in Hassan's case, one of Hassan's articles in

"al-Shar'e" accused Ali Muhsen of lying and embezzling. It is possible that Ali Muhsen would want to silence such reporting and is playing a role in the actions taken against Hassan. END COMMENT.)

¶4. (C) Hassan and Shabib's cases are now with Yemen's Criminal Court and they are appealing their cases to the Attorney General. The ROYG has for several years had its eye on Hassan and Shabib, who have covered controversial stories as private investigative journalists despite ROYG charges against them. In 2005 Hassan was sentenced to six months in jail for publishing an article on Yemen's military institutions, although the sentence was not enforced, and was later given a six month jail sentence (again not enforced) for writing on Yemeni presidential succession. In 2004 Shabib was given a six month jail sentence for writing on the arrests of reformers in Saudi Arabia, although his sentence was also suspended. (COMMENT: The pattern of non-enforced jail sentences probably reflects the ROYG's desire to intimidate Yemeni journalists into self-censorship without the more severe response that enforcing sentences would engender. Hassan and Shabib noted the MOD has reminded them of the previous charges against them and threatened to implement them. END COMMENT.)

¶5. (C) In a separate meeting Abd al-Karim al-Khayawani, an "al-Shar'e" journalist, met with EMBOFFS on July 30 and discussed the actions taken against him by ROYG security personnel. According to al-Khayawani, five men dressed in civilian clothes accompanied by a truck-mounted machine gun and claiming to be electricians showed up at his home on July ¶20. After his seven-year-old daughter opened the door, the men threw her aside, physically abused al-Khayawani, and dragged him into a civilian car. They then brought him to a prosecutor's office where they claimed to be national security officers and demanded to be let in. Al-Khayawani's arrest warrant was then prepared as he watched and the prosecutor called Yemen's Attorney General to arrange for al-Khayawani's home to be searched. Yemeni police broke into his home on the same day, held his wife at gunpoint, and confiscated papers, electronics, and family pictures. The prosecutor charged al-Khayawani with "overthrowing the system" and put him in prison for two hours after which he was brought back to the prosecutor's office and charged with being part of the "Sanaa Cell" terrorist group.

¶6. (C) After six days in prison al-Khayawani was questioned at the prosecutor's office about unpublished articles, poems, and personal letters found in his house during the raid, including a letter to al-Khayawani from a US journalist inquiring about the possibility of inviting Huthi representatives to the United States for a seminar on the situation in Saada. Based on this letter, they accused al-Khayawani of trying to change the US perception of the Huthis by attempting to send Huthis to the United States. Al-Khayawani was then charged with "promoting the Huthi ideology and communicating with the Huthis." However, he has since been released from custody due to health problems stemming from low blood pressure and a bad heart.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) "Al-Shar'e" stands out among Yemen's independent papers for its energy and professionalism. Even Minister of Information Hassan Ahmad al-Lawzi spoke well of it, at least at first, in a recent meeting with the Charge (REFTEL), saying he supports "al-Shar'e" and is proud to have personally granted the paper's publishing license. He added that "al-Shar'e" publishes news in a "new way," but unfortunately people "use their hands" to express displeasure with its reporting. These recent events tend to indicate its reporting is striking a nerve with Yemen's established powers, possibly with Ali Muhsen in particular. The failure of the ROYG to enforce sentences against the journalists does not, in any real way, blunt the desired effect of the intimidation. END COMMENT.

BRYAN